The One True Church | Ancient Faith Ministries

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Orthodox Christians claim that the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Chalcedonian Orthodox Church, is the one true Church of Christ. That's the confession of faith that we make. Of course, we have to say right away that there *are* members of the Orthodox Church who are relativistic, especially in America, there would be those who could say, "Well, all churches are the same," and, "no one can claim the truth," and, "different churches have different things," so we really shouldn't be so proud and so arrogant as to say that *our* church is the *only* church or the only *true* church, that we really should not do that. However, that is the teaching.

I mean, it really is the teaching of the Holy Scripture and certainly of the Councils and certainly of the Holy Fathers and the saints. There would be no doubt at all, absolutely no doubt, that it is really a dogma. I would say that, a kind of a formal, official conviction and teaching in the Eastern Orthodox Church, that the Eastern Orthodox Church and *only* the Eastern Orthodox Church is really, truly, fully the one Church of Christ.

It is the Church of the Messiah. It is the *qahal Israel*. It is the assembly of Israel *in* the Messiah, in Jesus, to which Gentiles like myself may now be included by faith and grace. And that indeed this church is *the* Church. Certainly it would be a dogma, an absolutely official teaching of the Eastern Orthodox Church, that at baptisms and at the Holy Eucharist, at the Divine Liturgy—and we also do this at the compline service at the daily services in church—we say the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. And we say it in the singular: not "we" as the Council said it, but "I," meaning "I accept it, I believe this."

We say the Creed, and in the Creed we say not only, "I believe in *one* God, the Father Almighty … and in *one* Lord, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, only-begotten … and in *one* Holy Spirit, the Lord and the Giver of life who is to be glorified together with the Father and the Son, who proceeds from the Father, rests in the Son, and is co-glorified and co-worshiped with the Father and the Son"—namely, that there's a Holy Trinity—but we also say, "and I believe in *one, holy, catholic*, and *apostolic* Church."

And here we would definitely say the Church that we say we believe in *is* the Eastern Orthodox Church. It's not the Roman Catholic Church. It's not an Oriental Orthodox Church. It's not one of the Protestant churches. It's not the Anglican Church. It's the Eastern Orthodox Church which, on the Planet earth, is a communion of Orthodox churches, self-governing churches, who are in communion, one with another, and claim that this is the Church that we believe in when we say the Nicene Creed.

What does that mean? What does that mean when we say that the Eastern Orthodox Church *is* the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church, the *una sacra*, the one, holy Church? What does that actually mean, and when we say that, what are we saying about the other churches? What is it that we are claiming? Well, I think that what it is is the following: I think this is exactly, I really believe that this is exactly what we mean, and I would even go further and say what we *should* mean, what we ought to mean when we are saying these words and making these claims.

First of all, we would say that there is such a thing as "the Church," "church" meaning "assembly of people, community of people." "*Ek kaleo*" in Greek means to call out; "*ekklesia*" is the term for "church." In the Greek Bible and in the New Testament, that word translates the Hebrew word "*qahal*," which means an assembly of God's chosen people, God's people, *when God himself is in the midst of them as their Lord and God*. It's when they are formally gathered together as God's people with Yahweh himself, the Lord God himself, the Lord God Almighty presiding, so to speak, at the actual assembly of people. That term, "church," was used first of all in the Book of Numbers. In any case, what we say is that there is an assembly of human beings that is the Church. That assembly is the Church, the Church of God and the Church of Christ. That's it.

Now, the members of that Church are all sinners, all sinful, fallible, weak, miserable, wretched human beings. All of the members of that Church are sinners. Here we would say as a definite teaching that there are those in the Church who are very, very holy, are very righteous, that they really are godly people. Maybe they are almost near being actually sinless.

Maybe it's even the case that Christ's mother, Mary, for example, as the leader in the Church and the greatest member of the Church that the Church ever had, was without personal sin of any mortal, unto-death type of sin. But certainly it would be the Orthodox teaching that there would be saints in the Church: really holy, righteous people, known (and unknown) to God. But even those people are sinners

to some degree, or have sinned to some degree. They are not God.

They certainly not God, and the saints themselves would be the first ones to tell you that that's the case. Every really holy, righteous saintly person admits before the face of God that they are sinful. As the saying goes, perhaps they're the ones who really know that they are. The rest of us, because we're not holy, we don't know how sinful we are, even. We might even think we're pretty good.

But the closer you come to God, the more you realize your sin, your wretchedness, your misery, your failures, your weaknesses. That's simply a law of the spiritual life. We have all these wonderful stories in our church tradition about that. The Apostle Paul said, "This saying is true and worthy of all acceptance, that the Lord came to save sinners, and I am the *protos*, I am the first, I am the foremost, and God chose me to show his great compassion and mercy toward people."

There's that wonderful story in the Desert Fathers about Abba Sisoes who is dying and he's filled with the Holy Spirit and he exudes the divine, uncreated light, and his face is shining, and he's filled with joy and truth, and he's humble and he's peaceful and he's meek and he's merciful and he's strong, and all the marvelous virtues of God Almighty. And then when they gather around him when he's dying and they know that he's dying because they smell the fragrance of the Holy Spirit all through the desert, they see the light over his cave, they hear the angels singing, and all this stuff—the story is built up. Then when they're finally at his deathbed, they say to him, "Abba, Father, give us a word before you depart and be with the Lord." And the holy abba doesn't say, "Accept Jesus as your personal savior or you will go to hell." He doesn't say, "Repent of your sins." He doesn't say, "Why are you still so weak and lowly." You know what he says? He says, "Pray for me, brothers. I have not yet begun to repent. Pray for me, that the Lord will receive me into paradise."

When I first read that, I have to actually say, I thought, "What kind of baloney is this? Why didn't he say something more prophetic, more judgmental, more incisive?" I even thought it was kind of like what they call a pious fraud, like false humility and all that kind of stuff. But as a matter of fact, as I learned, when I grew up and matured, that he was probably one of the few people who really could say it. The holier you are, the more sinful you know you are. So he's probably… We all say, "I'm a sinner, I'm a sinner." We don't even know what the heck we're talking about! So you've got to be pretty holy to know you're a sinner.

In any case, the Church has saints; it has holy people, but basically, it's still an

assembly of sinful, fallible, weak human beings, and most of the members of this Church on earth are *not* very holy and not very righteous, or they're in-between or they flip-flop back and forth. And that is certainly the case of the one true Church. It is made up of sinners.

However, we would also say that God himself, the Lord Almighty, has acted to gather, to form, to fashion, to grace his Church, his people. He *calls* his people. And people respond to the call, and they form a community. And in the Old Covenant, the *qahal* was the *qahal Israel*. It was the assembly of Israel. In the New Testament, it's the church of Jesus the Messiah. And in the New Testament it's still the *qahal Israel*. How many times St. Paul speaks about that: we the Gentiles are grafted onto Israel. There is no new Israel; there is the one Israel of God, which is the people that God has gathered. But once the Messiah comes, it includes the Gentiles. It includes the Jew and Gentile, slave and free, men and women, barbarian, Scythian, free, whatever. It includes any human being who's a sinner and wants to enter in to be saved. There's no exclusion of anybody who believes and accepts the Gospel, none.

In fact, there's the story of St. Herman of Alaska that some Russian sailors were in Kodiak or Spruce Island where he lived, and he was not a priest, but he had a chapel. He was praying all the time, and he invited the sailors to come and pray with him, to go into the chapel and pray with him. One of the sailors said, "Oh, Abba, monk, father, we can't go. We're sinners." And St. Herman said to the sailor, "That's good. That's a qualification. You can't come to church unless you're a sinner. Unless you're a sinner, you can't come. The church is not for saints, for righteous people. There aren't any, except those who are saved and holy and righteous because of faith, because of grace. And any person who is holy and righteous because of faith and grace would never consider himself a saint, but would confess himself as a sinner." So St. Herman told this sailor, "Being a sinner is what *qualifies* you to be a member of the Church. You can't *be* a member of the Church if you're not a sinner."

This Church is a concrete body of people. It's not an invisible thing. It's not some Platonic ideal in the sky. It's not something we're still expecting to come in history. In fact, at the end of the ages, there'll be no church, because everything will be Church. The Church on earth is the experience of the creation as God's kingdom until it comes in glory by grace and by the presence of the Holy Spirit and the indwelling of the word of God. But at the end of the world, there's no church; everything is Church. So the Church, it is something that is historical by definition: it exists in history by definition. It's a historical community, a concrete assembly of

people.

Are the members of this Church all holy? Well, St. Ambrose called the Church, "*simil iustus et peccator*"—the people in the Church are at the same time just and righteous *and* sinful. What did he mean by that? Well, the answer is "yes and no." If you ask the question, "Are the people holy?" the answer is "yes" and the answer is "no." We are holy because God has consecrated us. God has made us holy. We are a holy nation. We are a holy people. It says in the Torah of Moses as well as in the New Testament Scripture—Peter, for example—"You, therefore, be holy because I, your God, am holy." It's in Leviticus. It's in the letter of Peter. So we are consecrated. And in the Church we call everything holy: holy Scripture, holy altar, holy fathers, holy sacraments, holy services. Everything is holy. Everything is even divine. We say: the divine fathers, the divine canons, because they are what they are because of *God*, not because of us. God has consecrated them; God has made them holy. So in that sense, we are all holy.

But at the same time, we are not all holy at all, because we remain sinful. We sin against what we are. There's an old Christian saying that in the Church, you struggle to become what you *are* from God's point of view. From God's point of view, we are saved; *all* of us are saved. From God's point of view, we are all sanctified. From God's point of view, we are all glorified—but we have to accept it. So we are still sinful in our behavior; we are still struggling to be what we are, to live up to our Church membership. And that's why we constantly say the Lord's Prayer—"forgive us our trespasses as we forgive"—every day, we say, "Lord, have mercy on us sinners." Every day we say, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner," because we are both, at the same time—"*simul*," as it is in Latin, simultaneously, so to speak—sinful people whom God has consecrated who are trying to live according to God's teachings and God's commandments and what God has given us *so that we could be the Church*.

Saying this, we affirm again: it's *God* who is faithful. It's *God* who makes it to be what it is. It's not *we* who make the Church to be the Church. The Church is there before we even existed. We *enter into* a Church that pre-exists *us*.

One Russian Orthodox saint, Philaret of Moscow, a bishop of the 19th century, said, "When was the Church created? When was the Church instituted?" And he said, "Well, you can say that the Christian Church began on Pentecost in some way. But then you could also say that the Church began with the incarnation of Christ and his death on the cross. But you could also say that the Church began when God called Abraham." Then he went on so far as to say, "You could also say

that the Church in its mystical reality in communion with God through the Son in the Holy Spirit existed from all eternity. It's the very community and communion of the Holy Spirit itself which is the content of the Church."

Fr. Alexander Schmemann always used to like to say that the Church is not an organization or an institution with teachings and sacraments, mysteries, but it's a mystery; it's a great sacrament; it's a teaching; it's a Gospel that *has* organizations and *has* institutions. And the only real question is: are these organizations and institutions compatible with and appropriate to and expressive of the mystery of the Church as the communion in God?

When we confess, "I believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church," we are saying things about God. We are saying that the Church is one because there is one God; there is one Lord, there is one Holy Spirit; there is one faith; there is one baptism; there is one body. It has to be of one mind and one heart. That's what we confess, because, as far as God is concerned and by his action, the Church is one with the unity of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

When we say the Church is holy, it is holy because God consecrated and hallowed it, because God is holy. If we say the Church is catholic, *katholiki ekklesia*, it means that the Church is full, complete, and whole; there's absolutely nothing lacking to the Church of Christ as far as the possibility to our communion with God is concerned.

And then to say that the Church is apostolic not only means that it's built on the apostles of Jesus—those who are sent—and is built on Jesus himself as the last and final apostle—"*apostolos*" means "one who has been sent"—so the Father *sent* his Son into the world and Jesus said, "As the Father sent me, so I also send *you*." So the Church is *sent*; it has a mission; it is evangelical. It's interesting that in Latin the word "mission" comes from the same word in Greek where you get the word "apostolic." "*Apostelō*" in Greek means to send, and "mitto" in Latin means to send. So the Church is sent with the mission of Christ, a mission of God himself, but it's because of *God* we enter into it.

So *God* gives the Church. *God* institutes the Church. *God* makes the Church to be the Church. *God* gives his Gospel. *God* gives his commandments. *God* gives his teaching. God gives the worship. We worship God in the ways that *God* has commanded us to worship. And we have concrete forms of worship that begin in the law of Moses with the tabernacle, with the Temple, with the sacrificial system, with the feast days and fast days, with the lambs that are slain and the blood—but

all this is fulfilled in Christ and in the New Testament Church, the Israel of God, there is the commandments and the teaching and the good news and the forms of worship that God has given, and these are kept by the faithful people.

Now, the claim is that God remains faithful to his Church, just like he was faithful to Israel. Well, he's faithful to the Christian Church, too. The earliest Christian hymn in Timothy says, "If you suffer with me, you will reign with me. If you die with me, you will live with me. If you deny me, I'll deny you, but if you are faith*less*, I remain faith*ful* because I cannot deny myself."

So the Church is what it is because of the fidelity of God to the Church, and then humanly speaking there are always those in the Church who are faithful to God. They even may be grave sinners, but they're still faithful to God. An example would be King David in the Old Testament. He sinned magnificently, but he was still faithful to God. He did not deny God. He did not deny the commandments. He did not deny the worship of the temple. He did not deny keeping the feasts and the fasts and the sabbaths and the new moons that God had prescribed for his people. Actually, even prefigured in the Canaanite pagan religions, Yahweh took it, called it over, consecrated it, and made it his own. And then the final act of God is to make it all perfect, complete, and full in Christ. As it says in the Colossian letter and in the letter to the Hebrews in the New Testament, "The old was a shadow, but the *body*—the *soma*, the substance—belongs to Christ." The reality is Christ, is fulfilled in Christ. There's nothing beyond Christ. But this is because of the fidelity of God.

Now, the claim is this: sinful people can keep the truth of God. Sinful people can keep the commandments of God, not in the sense that we keep the commandments in doing them, but we can hold onto the commandments and say, "Yeah, these are really the commandments of God. I don't keep them. I don't fulfill them. I sin against them, but these are God's commandments." Sinful people can keep the worship of God. They can worship, themselves, and confess their sins, but even though they're sinners, they can keep the worship that God prescribed, the worship in spirit and truth about which Jesus spoke with the Samaritan woman at the well.

I'm doing an entire series on Ancient Faith Radio now on worship in spirit and truth, commentary on the Divine Liturgy of Chrysostom and Basil. We Orthodox believe that that Liturgy was inspired by God, and if you follow it, you'll have communion with God and your soul will be saved, but that Divine Liturgy is being celebrated, every time it's celebrated, by sinners. And how many times during the

Divine Liturgy do we ask God to accept our sacrifice? How often do we say to him, “Illumine our minds so we understand the Gospel”? How often do we say to him, “Forgive us our sins”? We’re saying it all the time through the entire service. So the service itself is holy and pure and good and godly, even though it’s being done by sinful people.

Hopefully, some of the people there are pretty righteous, pretty holy. We try to be as holy and righteous as we can, but we’re certainly not perfect. Here, Fr. George Florovsky always used to say, “The true Church is not the perfect Church, humanly speaking.” Institutionally speaking, the Church on earth is never perfect as far as the *members* are concerned, but it’s certainly perfect as far as God is concerned, and as far as the teachings and the worship are concerned.

So there is a teaching and there is worship, and that’s what we have to keep. Our claim would be: only the Orthodox Church keeps those teachings and that worship truly. We’re the only Church on earth, and we confess it, hopefully humbly and gratefully and with great terror that we’re going to answer for what we say, but what we do say is that this Church is really the one that has the right teachings and the right worship. It does, despite all the sins of the members.

There can be schisms and divisions within that Church. People can leave that Church. Christians can leave it and found other churches. In fact, in I Corinthians 11, the Apostle Paul actually wrote these words. I’ll just read them to you. They’re very well known words, but what he said was this. He said, “For in the first place, when you assemble as a church,” and it actually could be translated, “When you assemble as the assembly, when the assembly assembles, *synerchomai en ekklesia*, when you come together *as church*, in church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and I partly believe it, for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized.”

If you read it kind of using the Greek terms, you would say, “When you gather as *ekklesia*, as church, I hear that there are *schismata*, schisms, among you, and I partly believe it, for there must be heresies”—so you have schisms and heresies, factions—and then it says, “so that those who are tested and pass the test and are tried, they may be revealed, they may shine forth.” That’s what it really says.

So there’s going to be schisms; there’s going to be divisions. And here, we would say, we Orthodox, sometimes there’s schisms and divisions *within* the Church that we’re working out to heal, humanly speaking, by people who *do* accept the teaching and *do* accept the worship but they may be fighting about how to

understand it or how to apply or what the structure should be like. Sure, that goes on, but then there can be schisms and heresies *from* the Church, where people just leave this Church and make other churches and claim to *be* the Church.

And, of course, that's the problem that we're speaking about right now, because the fact of the matter is, from the earliest time of Christianity, from the very New Testament times, there were people who claimed to be Christians who were not *in* this Church that we believe we are in and that we believe was the Church of the apostles right after Jesus. There were Marcianites and Montanists and Docetists and all kinds of heretics in the first centuries. And we claim they were not really following the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They were not following the teachings of Jesus and the apostles. They were not properly interpreting the holy Scriptures of Israel, and they were, to put it simply, wrong. They were just wrong. They distorted the faith. They were not keeping the faith "once for all, delivered to the saints," as it says in Jude. Or I John says in the holy Scripture, "They went out from us, for they were not of us, for had they been of us, they would not have gone out from us."

So there are those who are gone out from Israel, and there are all kinds of heretics. Then when you go through history, the whole history of Christianity is practically nothing but a history of schisms and divisions. Sometimes these divisions and heresies were overcome, like, for example, the Arians. There were Arian Christians in the fourth century who denied the divinity of Christ. The Holy Fathers—Athanasius, Basil, Gregory, Hilary, Ambrose—fought against these guys, and, ultimately, the Arian heresy disappeared from history. I think the only Arians who exist nowadays are Jehovah's Witnesses, who believe that the Logos of God is Jesus Christ and he is the Lord of all creation and that he is the Lord of the living and the dead, but they deny that he's really divine with the same exact divinity as God the Father. That's classical Arianism.

There were schisms and divisions and they were always being fought out. There's always trouble within the Church and there's always divisions within the Church, and then there was the setting up of other churches, other assemblies, that were *not* in the apostolic tradition, did not follow the apostolic teachings, and did not worship according to apostolic worship. The people who were in those churches were sinners, because all people are sinners. So what we want to say here, very clearly, is: in the one true Church, all the members are sinners, and in all the churches that are deformed and perverted, corrupted, messed-up, teaching the wrong things, worshiping in the wrong way—they're also made up of sinners. There's no church that is not made up of sinners.

But there are churches who do *not* have what St. Paul and Timothy called “sound doctrine.” St. Paul writes to Timothy, “Preserve *sound, healthy* doctrine. Hold fast to what you have received. Cling to the *paradosis* (the tradition), the *parothiki*, the *depositum* that was given to you. Keep to the Gospel. Don’t change the Gospel.” Well, [there are these churches] because people *were* changing the Gospel and were not keeping what was given.

The Orthodox Church—Chalcedonian Eastern Orthodox Church—we actually believe that we hold firm the deposit. We hold firm what was given. We haven’t messed it up. Sinners though we be, the Church *as Church* still holds it intact. So the formal doctrine of the Eastern Orthodox Church, Chalcedonian Church, we believe is the true teaching and the worship of the Eastern Orthodox Church and how we baptize and how we chrismate and how we celebrate the Eucharist and how we keep the fasts and how we keep the feasts—we believe this is according to the word of God. It’s according to the Scriptures, it’s according to the Traditions which are not written in the Scriptures but are holy, and they are inspired by the Holy Spirit.

To look at the other side—and we’ve got to say it, clearly—we also believe that no other church really keeps this properly. The first major schisms that occurred that persist to the present day are in those churches that are called (and we call them) Oriental Orthodox churches: the Coptic Church, the Armenian Church, the Ethiopian Church, the Syrian Church following Jacob (so-called Jacobite Church), the Church of India. They’re the churches who did not accept the Council of Chalcedon, and, in fact, they were all of the churches that were not part of the Roman Empire at the time, the Latino-Greek churches.

Some people in all of these places stayed with the ecumenical, imperial Church (they were called Melkites usually), but the others were not. Here we’ve got to say it clearly: we, Chalcedonian Orthodox, say that the Council of Chalcedon is true. We think that Leo the Great, Pope of Rome, was a saint. We think that Severus and Dioscorus and some of the other people who are held as saints in those churches were not correct, but we can immediately add: maybe we’re wrong on that, maybe it was a misunderstanding, maybe they did hold the same doctrine and have the same worship but they didn’t think so at the time.

Maybe today we can meet together and say, “Yeah, we really do agree on the teaching. We really do agree on the worship,” although we may have some troubles over certain things. I know leavened bread [versus] unleavened bread [is an issue between] the Armenians and the Latins, but as a matter of pure fact, the

Oriental Orthodox churches and the Eastern Orthodox churches, the Chalcedonian churches, those churches that sponsor Ancient Faith Radio, were not in communion with each other. Maybe it's a terrible mistake. Maybe in God's eyes we are, but in history we are not. And we would still say that we believe Chalcedon was correct, and what they wanted to say and what they said was true, and that's our conviction.

Later on, more schisms take place. The whole Western Church goes into schism from the Eastern Church. And then teachings and practices and worships are developing in those churches. Then you had the Latin Church or the Franco-Latin Church, the church of Charlemagne, of the Holy Roman Empire. Then you had the whole Protestantism: Lutheranism, Calvinism, [Zwinglianism,] Anabaptists. Then you have the Church of England with Henry VIII and all of his wives and how they confessed the Christian faith.

Here it's got to be said very clearly: we can't identify with those churches. We do not believe that they are holding the faith truly, fully, and intact. There may be many holy people in those churches. In fact, many of the people in those churches may be in God's eyes a lot holier than we are: more righteous, more virtuous, more caring about the poor, more fighting their passions. God knows those things. But we're not comparing the average Christian to the average Christian. We're not comparing the most righteous to the most righteous. We're not comparing this theologian to that theologian. We're not comparing Fr. Bulgakov or Vladimir Lossky or Fr. Schmemann to Hans Küng and Karl Rahner in the Catholic Church or Rowan Williams in the Anglican Church or Bonhoeffer or Barth or Bultmann in Protestant churches.

We're not comparing theologians or saints or sinners or average parishioners. What we are comparing is: what does the church formally teach and what does the church do when it worships. And here we have to say Eastern Orthodox Christians have problems with all other churches except its own on this point. We do not recognize our worship, completely and fully, carefully, in the other churches.

There are what St. Augustine called, way back in the fourth, fifth century, "vistigia ecclesia," vestiges of the Church in other churches. Basil the Great even chided the Arians that although they taught the wrong doctrine, they still baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So they had a proper baptismal formula. He said, "What are you doing: baptizing in the name of one God and two creatures? Why do you baptize in the name of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—if you don't believe that the Son and the Holy Spirit are equally divine with

God the Father?”

So there’s lots of anomalies. There’s lots of contradictions. There’s lots of stuff that you can’t explain clearly. It doesn’t make sense, because irrational things aren’t able to be explained clearly. That’s why they’re irrational. At the same time, we have to say: whatever God thinks about those folks, whatever he thinks about those people—not to speak about Jews who do not accept Jesus, not to speak of Buddhists or Hindus or—we’ll talk about that some other time—but when it simply comes to the Christians, what we have to say, hopefully humbly but hopefully firmly, we still believe that it’s *only* the Chalcedonian Eastern Orthodox Church that holds it all together fully intact without any formal errors in its doctrine and in its worship.

We claim that all the other churches have errors in doctrine and worship which, if you follow them, you will be led astray. You will *not* be led into communion with God. You’ll be led into the vain imaginations of some human being’s mind and heart. You’ll follow some human teaching. In St. Paul’s terms, you’ll be following ultimately another gospel. Or in the words of the Jude letter in the New Testament, you’d be following a faith that is *not* the one “once for all given to the saints.”

It doesn’t mean that it’s completely and totally *bad*. It doesn’t mean that it’s completely and totally erroneous. It doesn’t mean that there aren’t any light and truth and grace in those teachings; there very well may be. Or, to put it more accurately, the errors can be mixed together with many true and good things.

Let’s speak about Jews. If a Jew would say, “There is one God; blessed is he who created heaven and earth,” we wouldn’t say, “That’s wrong; you’re a Jew.” We’d say, “No, that’s right! Thanks be to God! We agree about that. That’s fine, but now let’s talk about Yeshua, the son of Joseph of Nazareth. Who’s *he*?” And there we would part company, at least with contemporary Jews of all kinds, liberal, conservative, and Hasidic, because they do not confess him as the Messiah nor as God’s Son who is divine with the same divinity as the one, true, and living God who has become really human with the same humanity that we all share. In other words, they don’t hold Christian doctrine. So their worship would not express it.

Now, the doctrine is expressed in worship, and worship is the expression of the doctrine. They have to go together. If we were speaking … Let’s speak about someone else: Roman Catholics. We could say, “Yes, it’s wonderful that you believe in the Trinity, but the way that you have often explained it is unacceptable to us. Like the *filioque* clause in the Creed. You changed the Creed. We think it’s wrong.

We cannot affirm it. We cannot be in communion with you if you affirm it. If you change your mind or explain it perhaps in a way that's okay, acceptable, perhaps we can work it out. But as it is historically, we can't."

And we certainly do not believe in the Petrine doctrine about the Pope of Rome, that he has special prerogatives, that he has episcopal jurisdiction over every Christian in the world including the other bishops and that when he speaks *ex cathedra* what he says is true *ex sese non ex consensu Ecclesiae*—is true in itself and is true because he said it, and it doesn't depend on the consensus of the Church. Well, we would say, "We don't agree with that; that's just not right."

When you come to the Anglican Church, there's plenty of stuff we don't agree [on] with them, especially in more recent days. When I was a young fellow, I often wondered why we were even separated from the Anglicans in so many ways, because they seemed to be holding pretty much what we held, but when you get to know them better, and then as time passed, you see that that's not true *as a church*. There may be people who fight for true things in that church. There may be people who hold onto them. There may be preachers who preach things properly, but the church as church, we would say, *does not*. It simply does not, and that's why our churches are not in communion.

Then when you get into the Protestants, whether it's evangelical, conservative, liberals, sectarians, whatever, the 2,500 denominations that according to UNESCO several years ago are allegedly existing on the planet earth, mega-churches and whatever, we would just simply say, "That is not the faith. That's just not the Gospel the way we understand it."

We would say: only the Eastern Chalcedonians, our Church, the Orthodox Church, holds it completely, purely intact. Yes, we say that. That's our conviction. We say the Latin Church was in communion with this up until a certain period but then a deviation started taking place. We would say that, with the Ethiopians and Egyptians and Syrians and Armenians, we had a unity of faith for centuries, but then it broke. So this is what our claim is, and we say that it is still there.

Ultimately what we are saying is: we have dependable doctrine and dependable worship, and if you follow it, you will save your soul. If you follow it, but what is this *it*? Well, we believe this *it* is there. As some of our contemporary theologians, for example Vladimir Lossky, would say, "That *it* in itself is a mystical reality that contains many elements, and there are witnesses to that *it*, to that truth, to that light, to that grace." To use New Testament terms: fullness of life, fullness of

grace, fullness of truth, fullness of Christ, fullness of God.

Well, that fullness is testified to by the Scriptures, by the Liturgy, by the sacraments, by the liturgical services and offices, by the fasts and the feasts, by the saints who are canonized, by the decrees and the canons of the ecumenical councils that these churches universally receive (the seven councils [that] are called ecumenical and several others in addition, like the Palamite councils). The doctrinal, ethical, and liturgical teachings and structures of these churches, which we Orthodox may violate every day *de facto* and fight over, but they're still there, and that is the truth. And we can add here, even the icons, because we believe that we confess our faith in words and in images. So a truly Orthodoxly executed icon is also a testimony to the truth of the Church.

The Church has what I used to call when I used to teach dogmatic theology, it's got its "authoritative witnesses." There are witnesses, testimonies, to this truth, the first of which is the holy Scripture and the Bible itself. And this is our faith, and what we would say is, "Yes, indeed, we think that only this Church holds it completely, truly, fully, and rightly." Does this mean everybody else is going to hell? No. Does it mean that everybody who's in this Church is going to heaven? (You know, talking Sunday-School language.) No.

We may violate what we have. We may sin against it. We may hold it formally and deny it in our behavior, our actual personal behavior, individual behavior, or even ecclesial behavior. Some of our dioceses could be very much in violation of the Orthodox faith by how they behave nowadays. In fact, I think we are, but still that doesn't change the fact that the Scriptures, the canons, the saints, the icons—which we all hold and refer to—are really witnesses that the Eastern Orthodox Chalcedonian Church is the one true Church of Christ; and, as a matter of fact, where other churches deviate from these things, they are not. Some deviate a lot; some don't deviate that much, but the deviation is there.

Here, in a polemical literature of the Orthodox Church, especially in the last century, recent centuries, we Orthodox used to use as a formula—I was taught this as a child, for example—that the problem with the non-Orthodox Christians is that some of them add things to the Christian faith that shouldn't be there, and other people take things away from Christianity which ought to be there, and thereby change the teaching. Here the reference would be to the Bible, because in the law of Moses in Deuteronomy, it says it twice: in the fourth chapter and in the twelfth chapter, it says this (Deuteronomy 4):

> Now, O Israel, give heed to the statutes and the ordinances which I teach you, *and do them* that you may live and go in and take possession of the land which the Lord, the God of your fathers, gives you.

And then it says this sentence:

> You shall not *add* to the word which I command you, nor take *from* it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you.

So you don't add anything, and you don't subtract anything. It says exactly the same thing in the twelfth chapter, so I won't read it. But it also says in the Revelation of St. John, the Apocalypse of John, the very last book of the Bible for Christians, exactly this same teaching. I will read it to you. Revelation 22:18:

> I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book. If anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

What we claim is: we have neither added extraneous and therefore erroneous things nor have we taken away good, holy, essential things and thereby deformed the faith, the doctrine, the worship, and the Church itself. That is our teaching, and that is our conviction. That is essential to being an Orthodox Christian, because we not only believe in one God, the Father Almighty; we not only believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten, not made, of one essence with the Father, who is incarnate of the Virgin Mary and became human; we not only believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, who is to be co-worshiped and co-adored with the Father and the [Son], who proceeds from the Father; but we also believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, as a concrete reality in human history.

And we confess, alas, in some sense alas, that we believe some Christian churches, communities, have departed from orthodoxy. They are non-orthodox, and in some

way they have deformed and changed and added or subtracted or corrupted or transformed or transmuted or emasculated the doctrine. And therefore their worship is not dependable. That is indeed what we believe, and we have to know we're going to answer before God for that. If we claim that this is our faith, we're going to have to answer. God's going to say to everyone who's a member of the Orthodox Church, "If you claim this, if you believe this, then what are you doing? How are you acting? What are you teaching? How are you relating to other people? How are you relating to yourself in your mind, soul, heart, and body?"

We will answer for what we are given, and that's a teaching of Jesus. Everyone will give an account, according to what they have received. Those who have received much are going to have to answer for much. But those who claim to have received it all and kept it all and that their Church is really true and right and full and gracious and dependable and one and holy and catholic and apostolic, we're going to have to answer for that, too. But we've got to confess it, simply because we are convinced that it's the truth, that it is the truth. God'll know what to do with us, and God'll know what to do with every human being in the whole of creation. That's his business. Our business is to remain faithful to the truth.

And for us, the truth of God, the truth of Christ, the truth of the Spirit of truth, the Holy Spirit, is the Church, which, in the New Testament is called the fullness of him who fills all in all (Ephesians), and the Church is called the household of the living God, the pillar, and the bulwark of the truth. We believe that that is still with us, and we believe that *that* is the Eastern Orthodox Church.

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